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2008 Provincial Reconstruction Team News

-Iraqi TV Journalists Learn Skills at PRT Workshop-

By Jonathan Cebra
Special Correspondent

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Erbil - Kurdistan Region television journalists learned new techniques at a two-week training program in March and proved to be excellent students and colleagues, according to the American media expert who helped upgrade their media skills.

Approximately 15 reporters, editors, and camera operators from six local TV stations participated in the program conducted by Professor Robert Hooper of the University of California, San Diego and sponsored by the Erbil Provisional Reconstruction Team (PRT).



University of California professor and media expert Robert Hooper trains KRG TV journalists in on camera interview techniques during a PRT sponsored workshop in Erbil.

Professor Hooper is an accomplished television producer and documentary maker with extensive international experience training broadcast journalists and developing curriculums in several countries. In his workshop in Erbil, Hooper focused on basic techniques of interviewing and reporting, writing and story narrative, lighting, camera framing, and presentation.

In describing his experience, Hooper said, "My colleagues in Kurdistan kept me on my toes from day one. They work extraordinarily hard when directly challenged with real world assignments, insisting on adapting Western techniques of writing, reporting and interviewing to the realities of television broadcasting in northern Iraq."

When the journalists pointed out that Kurdish sentence structure differed from English, Hooper suggested they creatively adapt the structural models presented (e.g., inverted pyramid for writing stories, with most important material as the lead) to work most effectively in the Kurdish language and reach their target audience.

Hooper brought several video clips to demonstrate concepts and had sent worksheet handouts in advance for translation, but the class most appreciated hands on exercises.

Hooper added, "They readily revise basic concepts of news writing and journalism to the nuances of Kurdish culture and the structural differences of the Kurdish language. They respond best when directly confronted with newsgathering challenges in the studio and in the field. I found them to be some of the most engaging and inspiring colleagues I have met in over twenty years work in other nations."

Hooper spoke of how "global media and technology are shrinking the world and bringing once isolated people closer together." He added, "Kurdistan is now poised to join the global conversation and tell its own remarkable stories from its own cultures and perspectives. In this regard, it can serve as a role model for other regions of Iraq, and the emerging television professionals, filmmakers, visual artists and journalists who will help build the nation and shape its future."

The distances which the participants traveled to participate demonstrated the value which they ascribed to the workshop. One station (KurdSat) based in Sulaimaniyah (KurdSat) sent three journalists to Erbil for the duration of the workshop.

During the second week of the conference, downtown roads were closed to normal traffic due to the Conference of Arab Parliamentarians taking place in Erbil – forcing participants to walk a great distance to reach the training venue.

Workshop participant Hemin Mam Rash reported: "As a journalist in more than one organization [Galle Kurdistan TV, Radio, Kurdistan Nwe newspaper and PUKMedia.com] and a journalism student at Salahaddin University, it was very useful to have an expert professional provide practical training, especially such a person as Dr Hooper who has spent years in the media field. The experience and information that I learned during these two weeks was more valuable than two years in university."

On several occasions, Professor Hooper accompanied the PRT on a visit to the Journalism Department of the local Technical Institute and three local television stations (Galle Kurdistan, Yegirtu, and Zagros). All of the station managers stressed how useful their journalists found the workshops and expressed interest in further collaboration.

One of the local television stations (Yegirtu Television) produced a twenty minute program (following the news) regarding the workshop. The program included brief interviews with Professor Hooper and several participants who explained what they had learned during the workshop.

At the conclusion of the program, Professor Hooper distributed not only certificates for completion of the workshop, but also equipment such as filters and reflectors which are not available locally.